



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue • 4th floor • Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 684-0228

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 345/03

Name and Address of Property: **California Avenue Substation
4304 SW Dakota St.**

Legal Description: Walter Hainsworth's Second Addition to the City of West Seattle, Block 4, Lots 25, 26, and 27

At the public meeting held on November 5, 2003, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the California Avenue Substation at 4304 SW Dakota St. as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

(F.) Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.

DESCRIPTION

The California Avenue Substation is a one-story brick building located on a slight rise on the southwest corner of California Avenue SW and SW Dakota Street with the main entrance located on Dakota Street. The building is located on the southeastern corner of the property, which comprises five lots and is approximately 14,685 square feet in area. The first floor of the building is about seven feet above the sidewalk. The building has 12-inch brick walls, a concrete floor and foundation, and has no basement. Its dimensions are 32 feet by 42 feet, 4 inches, and it is 17 feet high from the floor to the high point of the roof, with an adjoining portion that is 19 feet by 52 feet, and 13 feet, 2 inches from the floor to the high point of the roof. It occupies 2,418 square feet, and is larger than most City Light Substations. A three-foot high concrete retaining wall with a vitrified brick coping is located between the sidewalk and the building along California Avenue SW and SW Dakota Street. There is a considerable amount of overgrown landscaping between the retaining wall and the building. On the sidewalk along California Avenue SW, there are two manhole covers with the name, "P.S.P. & L. Co."

The front door and entrance is on SW Dakota Street. From the sidewalk on SW Dakota Street, one enters the building via concrete stairs between two brick piers that define the ends of the retaining wall at the entry. Tall double metal doors on the west elevation provided access to the equipment yard and loading area along SW Dakota Street. A trolley beam originally extended from the outdoor

loading area into the building, but the only evidence of this that remains is a small opening near the top of the metal doors. A narrow driveway into the loading area immediately west of the substation provided vehicle access and has a wrought iron gate set between two brick piers with concrete caps. There is a fenced area and concrete pad to the west of the building. A wrought iron fence, which is barely visible behind the shrubbery, extends from the gate to the alley along the concrete pad. This fence terminates in another brick pier at the alley similar to those at the gate. A newer chain link fence extends along the outside of the concrete pad on the alley and on the north, and connects to the northwest corner of the building. The electrical transmission equipment that was located on the concrete pad in this fenced area has all been removed.

The substation is a flat-roofed structure with two rectangular plan sections, with the eastern portion having a slightly higher roofline than the western section. The face brick was laid with every sixth course consisting of a stretcher and two headers laid alternately. On the projecting entry, there is a course of soldier brickwork at the line of the lintel above the entrance. This band of soldier brickwork continues on the south and east elevations of the western portion of the building. There is also a course of bricks used as voussoirs above the arched entryway and the arched windows (noted as a Rolok course on the plans). A course of soldier brickwork is also found above each of the rectangular windows. The entrance is located in a projecting area with a gabled roofline and terra cotta coping. The gabled roofline is repeated in the stepped parapet of the main roof above.

The building shows Neoclassical Revival details, particularly on the principal south elevation. On the south elevation, the western half of the building extends nine feet beyond the eastern section, creating an L-shaped footprint. The eastern portion of the south elevation, which contains the main entrance, is more elaborately detailed and features a terra cotta trimmed parapet wall, with a terra cotta cornice at the base and terra cotta coping above. The recessed central entry contains a paneled oak door, which is in relatively poor condition, and has sidelights and a transom. The entrance is framed by terra cotta pilasters and a terra cotta tympanum above the recessed entrance. The tympanum includes a central, elaborate wreath of leaves, flowers and festoons of leaves. The wreath motif is repeated in the surrounding archivolt. The pilasters are on a terra cotta plinth, and there are dentils in the architrave. There are three terra cotta panels above the entrance, with a total of four rosettes. There are square terra cotta medallions with a decorative pattern resembling a fleur-de-lis set above the windows, four on the south elevation, two on the east elevation facing California Street, and one on the east wall of the western portion of the building. The east elevation also has two terra cotta plaques set in the parapet wall between the cornice and the coping, which project slightly above the roofline. These plaques have a simple decorative shield pattern.

One interesting note on the terra cotta details is that they were apparently similar to standard details from the Gladding McBean Company. Gladding McBean was the major producer of terra cotta in California and supplied terra cotta for many Seattle buildings. Some details on this building were the same as at the Laurelhurst Substation, constructed a few years earlier.

All of the windows in the substation are multi-paned steel windows, with casements below and with fixed windows above. All of the panes are textured vision-proof glass. All windows have terra cotta sills. On the south elevation, there are two multi-paned metal casement windows on either side of the entrance, with a fixed multi-paned metal arched window above. Both of these lower windows (below the arch) are covered with plywood and several panes are broken. There are two smaller multi-paned metal windows on the western half of the south elevation, also covered with plywood on the lower,

casement portions. There are no windows on the western elevation of the building, but there are vents at the floor level. On the east elevation, there are two groups of similar multi-paned metal windows, each consisting of a large central opening flanked by two narrow sidelights. There are casement operable sections in the large central openings. These windows also have several broken panes, and a few of the broken windows have been replaced. There are four multi-paned steel windows on the north elevation, similar to those on the south elevation of the western portion of the building. One window on the east elevation of the western portion of the building has been filled in with bricks. This appears to have been done a long time ago as the bricks are a good match for those on the rest of the building.

Other minor details of the building include four down lights mounted on the west elevation, which illuminated the equipment area on the concrete pad and several small metal panels below the cornice on the west elevation. There are a few pipe ends in the concrete pad, but little evidence of the electrical transmission equipment that was once located there.

Except for minor alterations, the building has retained its integrity despite a lack of maintenance. The substation building is covered with ivy and obscured by dense landscaping, on all but the western elevation. The plantings do not appear to have historic value and are overgrown; they include juniper, camellia, and other broadleaf evergreen shrubs.

Building Interior

The interior of the building has been empty since the electrical equipment was removed in 1984. The total square footage is 2,418 square feet. The largest space (about 1,300 square feet) is in the eastern half of the building, which was used by City Light crews as a lunchroom in the 1970's. There is a sink and small separate room with a toilet in the southeast corner of the building. On the northeast corner, there is a separate room with a higher ceiling that is open to the roof. The western half of the building is divided into three rows of concrete cubicles used for station banks; no equipment remains. The location of the original trolley beam, which shows in the 1937 photograph of the building, is evident from the holes near the top of the tall metal doors on the building's west wall.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Puget Sound Power & Light Company constructed this distribution substation in 1930 as part of their private electric utility operations within the City of Seattle. It is one of a group of fully automatic substations constructed by Puget Sound Power & Light in the late 1920s to early 1930s in Seattle. Puget Sound Power & Light Company purchased the property on the corner of California Avenue SW and SW Dakota Street on October 27, 1925.

The predecessor of Puget Sound Power & Light was the Seattle Electric Company, first organized in 1886. A reorganized and much larger Seattle Electric Company, was formed in 1900 by a merger of ten Seattle utility and streetcar businesses under the control of Stone and Webster, a Boston-based company. Jacob Furth became president of the newly-formed company in 1900. In 1912, Puget Sound Traction, Light & Power Company was organized (also under Jacob Furth) and acquired the assets of several companies including the Seattle Electric Company, Puget Sound Power Company, and others. Between 1912 and 1920, eight more utility companies in the Puget Sound area were

integrated into this system. In 1919, the City of Seattle acquired the streetcar system from Puget Sound Traction, Light & Power Company. The company name changed to Puget Sound Power & Light in 1920. The company remained under the control of Stone & Webster. The company was directed by A.W. Leonard from 1914 to 1931 and by Frank McLaughlin from 1931 to 1959.

Seattle City Light had its beginnings in 1902, when Seattle voters approved a bond issue to build a hydroelectric plant on the Cedar River. This was the nation's first municipally owned hydroelectric project. The Cedar Falls plant first generated power in 1905 under the control of the City Water Department. Seattle City Light was officially born in April 1910 when the City Council created a separate lighting department. In 1911, J.D. Ross was named the first Superintendent of Seattle City Light, and during his 27-year career with Seattle City Light, he spearheaded a persistent campaign against private power. At several times, he recommended that the City Council authorize Seattle City Light to buy out Puget Power. In 1933, the state legislature authorized municipal systems to extend their lines beyond city limits without regulation or payment of offsetting taxes. The City of Seattle began to seek aid from investment bankers in its move to take over Puget Power. In 1934, J.D. Ross announced his intention for the City of Seattle to acquire all of Puget Sound Power & Light. Previously he had proposed that the city acquire only the company's system in Seattle. There was strong opposition to Ross's ambitious plan both within Seattle and from other cities in the Puget Sound area.

The federal Utility Holding Company Act of 1935 required companies that owned controlling stock in several geographically unrelated utilities to dispose of those interests and make each utility an independent firm. In 1943, ownership of Puget Power passed to approximately 16,000 individual stockholders, most of whom were Washington State residents. In November 1943, the Seattle City Council adopted a resolution that confirmed the city's intention to take over service to Puget Sound Power & Light's Seattle customers when the company's 50-year franchise expired in 1952. During and immediately after World War II, the public-private power battle was a central feature of city politics. In 1945, Seattle was the only major city in the U.S. that had both its own municipal power system and competing service provided by a private power company. Seattle made a formal offer to purchase the company facilities in 1950 for \$25,850,000. This was approved by the Puget Sound Power & Light Board of Directors, subject to a Seattle vote. This became Proposition C on the November 7, 1950 ballot. Proposition C passed by a slim margin of only 724 votes.

Seattle City Light had a nearby West Seattle distributing substation on California Avenue SW at SW Alaska Street, located three blocks south of Puget Sound Power & Light's California Avenue Substation. This substation, which was constructed in 1909, is no longer extant. It was sold by Seattle City Light on November 14, 1957. The close proximity of the two substations was used as an example of the duplication between City Light and Puget Sound Power & Light in Seattle's campaign to take over Puget Power's Seattle facilities. Customers were served by two sets of utilities, each with its own set of power lines.

On March 5, 1951, Seattle City Light purchased Puget Sound Power & Light Company's Seattle-area properties, including the California Avenue Substation in West Seattle. After the purchase, Seattle City Light became the sole dispenser of electric power in Seattle. The elimination of duplication resulted in substantial savings, which translated into rate reductions for consumers.

The City Light purchase included three transmission substations and ten distribution substation buildings, including this one. The California Avenue Substation was one of three distribution substations in Seattle with brick exteriors and decorative trim made of either terra cotta or cast stone. The other brick substations were located in Laurelhurst and on East Pine in the Central Area. These brick substations were designed to be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhoods. No architect is listed as the designer of these substations, which were all apparently detailed by Puget Sound Power & Light designers. Some of the terra cotta details on the California Avenue Substation are listed on the plans as being the same as the details at the Laurelhurst Substation. The preferred material for the majority of substations constructed at this time was reinforced concrete. (The Canal Substation between Fremont and Ballard is an extant example of a reinforced concrete transmission substation built by Puget Sound Power & Light in 1927-28.)

The California Avenue Substation is the only remaining brick substation of the original three constructed by Puget Sound Power & Light Company. It is the only distribution substation building of the original ten constructed by the company in Seattle and transferred to the City, which remains in City Light ownership. In addition to the California Avenue, Laurelhurst, and East Pine Substations, the other distribution substation buildings in the City Light purchase included the Fisher's Mill Substation, Pasadena Place Substation, Queen Anne Substation, Rainier Avenue Substation, Spokane Street Substation, Union Street Substation, and West Alaska Street Substation. Only one other of the ten Puget Sound Power & Light distribution substations, Rainier Avenue, is known to remain extant at this time. The Rainier Avenue Substation building has been substantially altered and is now a privately owned Asian restaurant. The only substation built by Puget Sound Power & Light still in current use by Seattle City Light is the Canal Substation, which is a transmission or receiving substation.

In 1957, some alterations were made to the California Avenue Substation by City Light, but the alterations were primarily to the concrete pad immediately west of the substation building. The alterations included an addition to the substation concrete pad, repaving of the driveway, removal of a portion of the fence and gate, and installation of a "standard" fence and gate on the north and west sides of the concrete pad. The wrought iron fence and gate on the south side of the pad appears to be original. Also at this time (1957), the nearby City Light West Seattle Substation at California Avenue and SW Alaska Street was declared surplus by the City and sold to a private purchaser and subsequently demolished.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the east room of the California Avenue Substation building was partly cleaned and used as a lunchroom by City Light line crews. The roof was leaking by this time. All of the outdoor electrical equipment was removed in 1984. The internal electrical equipment was probably also removed at this time.

In 2002, City Light prepared to put 53 properties up for sale that were no longer needed to provide electricity to Seattle homes and businesses. These properties, which include the California Avenue Substation, were first offered to government agencies before they are made available for sale to private developers. The California Avenue Substation was slated for acquisition from City Light by Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation. The substation was listed in the 2000 Pro Parks Levy for development as a park site, with improvements to the building for community use.

The California Avenue Substation is significant as the only remaining brick substation of the original three brick substations built by Puget Sound Power & Light Company. Only one other substation in Seattle built by Puget Sound Power & Light remains extant: the one on Rainier Avenue, which is no longer owned by City Light. The reinforced concrete Rainier Avenue building was a less distinctive building in its original form, and it has undergone substantial renovations.

The architecturally distinctive, brick California Avenue Substation is noteworthy for its design, including its Neoclassical Revival terra cotta details. It is more elaborate than most substations of its period and reflects the company's intention to design substations that would blend with and be an asset to a residential neighborhood. The other extant substation built by Puget Sound Power and Light is the Canal Substation in the Ballard/Fremont area, which was constructed in 1927-1928. The imposing Canal Substation is much larger and has a much more industrial appearance than the California Substation. Another important distinction is that the Canal Substation has a different function; it is a transmission substation rather than a distribution substation like the California Avenue Substation.

The California Avenue Substation is also important for its association with the era of privately owned electric utilities in Seattle, including the history of Puget Sound Power & Light, the competition between the company and City Light, and with the evolution of City Light as the sole supplier of electric power in the area.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include: The exterior of the building, and the site as described in the above legal description

Issued: November 25, 2003

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